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**CREED WELCOMES COMMISSION DECISION TO REMOVE BEEF QUOTAS FROM
MERCOSUR OFFER**

The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Michael Creed TD, has welcomed the decision by the European Commission to exclude a tariff rate quota (TRQ) for beef from the offer made in Brussels yesterday by the EU under the renewed free trade negotiations with the Mercosur trading bloc. The development, which was confirmed in advance to Member State officials, comes at the end of a period of strong and sustained lobbying by Ireland and a number of other Member States after earlier indications that a beef TRQ would be included in the offer to be made by European Commissioner for Trade, Cecilia Malmström.

The Minister said, *“I warmly welcome the fact that a tariff rate quota for beef has not been included in yesterday’s offer. Ireland has always been to the forefront in highlighting concerns about the very severe impact that a trade deal with Mercosur would have on the European beef sector. We have intensified those efforts in recent months as the prospect of a renewal in the negotiations grew, and particularly following the suggested inclusion of a TRQ for beef. We have worked very closely with other Member States in both Agriculture and Trade formations, and I am pleased to see those efforts bearing fruit.”*

Although noting this positive development, the Minister referred to the need for continued vigilance in relation to the conduct of these trade negotiations, particularly against the backdrop of the ongoing market difficulties being experienced by farmers across Europe.

Ireland had previously called for a period of further analysis to be undertaken in order to fully assess, among other things, the cumulative impact of beef quota concessions granted under other free trade agreements. It had also said that the treatment of sensitive products should be handled in a consistent manner across all free trade negotiations, by leaving such issues to the final stages of negotiations.

Addressing these points, the Minister said, *“I hope and expect that the required time will now be made available to allow the completion of the required impact assessment by the Commission, and that the findings will be fully taken into account when the negotiations move into their next phase. I will also work to ensure that our concerns in relation to the timing of any TRQ offer for beef are acknowledged, and that any TRQ ultimately considered is structured in a way that mitigates the potential impact on the EU beef sector.”*

Finally, and putting his comments in a broader context, the Minister explained the importance of trade for Ireland as a small open economy, and the fact that Ireland supports the implementation of free trade agreements between the EU and other trading blocs as long as they reflect the interests of Member States. However, the Commission’s own analysis has demonstrated the potentially very damaging impact of a Mercosur deal on the European agriculture sector. Ireland is uniquely exposed to any such adverse market developments, given that more than 90% of our beef production is exported to the EU. The Minister said these difficulties must be acknowledged, and he and his Government colleagues will continue to strongly defend Ireland’s interests in this regard.

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